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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: NEW ANTI-LTTE TAMIL PARTY: A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE TAMIL NATIONAL ALLIANCE?

Classified By: James F. Entwistle, Charge' d'Affaires, a.i. 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A new Tamil umbrella political party hopes to pose an alternative to the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and to attract prominent non-LTTE Tamils, such as Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) misfit V. Anandasangaree and People's Liberation Front of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) chief D. Sidharthan. Whether motivated by true peace goals or personal vendetta, the new party faces a predominant terrorist organization that rarely tolerates "dissident" Tamil voices. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a March 15 meeting with poloff, Dr. K. Vigneswaran, who until recently had been political advisor to former paramilitary-turned -anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) leader and Cabinet Minister Douglas Devananda, explained his motives for seeking to register the All Ceylon Tamil United Front (ACTUF). The ACTUF proposes to offer a "non-duplicitous" federal (versus separatist) approach to the ethnic conflict and pose "a credible democratic alternative to the LTTE and its parliamentary mouthpiece, the TNA." Vigneswaran claimed that several key Tamil politicians had agreed to join the new umbrella party once its charter is complete, including Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader V. Anandasangaree, D. Sidharthan, the leader of the former anti-LTTE paramilitary People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), as well as several former EPDP members. The new umbrella party would allow members to maintain their original party identities or take the ACTUF title exclusively. Vigneswaran said he wants to exclude those who are unwilling to convert to the democratic mainstream and "get out of the militant mindset," which, he lamented, many Tamil politicians (including, presumably, EPDP leader Devananda) find difficult to do.

¶3. (C) While Vigneswaran faults the anti-LTTE parties for being unable to separate themselves from their paramilitary roots to provide "a credible democratic alternative" to the LTTE, he does not believe that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) offers Tamils a truly independent political party. Vigneswaran claimed the TNA lacks vision, stating, "They

decide their agenda based on what the LTTE says. They aren't able to provide leadership to the Tamil people because they have fallen into the LTTE trap." He said he wanted to dispel the popular (but unfounded) notion that "Tamil" equals "Tiger," and redefine the political name game from pro or anti-LTTE to pro-Tamil. The semantic debate about who is pro- or anti-LTTE deflects attention from the real problem--a viable political settlement to the conflict. "The Sinhalese want us to be anti-LTTE, but civilizing the LTTE is not our main agenda," he noted, adding, "There is no general interest on the Sinhala side to find a solution, but only to rein in the LTTE." At the same time, he argued, delaying a political solution only benefits the LTTE. President Mahinda Rajapaksa "isn't interested in a solution to the Tamil problem" either, he asserted.

¶4. (C) The key element of the final settlement ACTUF envisions, according to Vigneswaran, is federalism. No one from the Tamil side has put forth a credible solution that does not "duplicitously" seek a separate Tamil state under the guise of a federalist agenda, he commented. "We don't have to sit around and wait for the LTTE to discuss the details of a federal solution," he remarked. He contended the Tamil movement needs a viable alternative to a separate state, claiming that prior to some of its members joining the (pro-LTTE and therefore assumedly pro-Eelam) TNA, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) never insisted on a separate Tamil state. The former civil servant and Secretary to the North East Province said he proposes instead a system of "Asymmetric Devolution," which would give Tamil areas more influence over civil authorities than Colombo would likely agree to give. He cited Malaysia and Finland as models that could be adapted to Sri Lanka.

COLOMBO 00000470 002 OF 002

¶5. (C) Addressing the question of armed groups suspected of working with government collusion, Vigneswaran claimed, "Only the EPDP and Karuna are currently working with the Sri Lankan Security Forces." Splinter members of PLOTE and EPRLF may be involved in armed activity, he speculated, but not under the orders of party leadership. He said that the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) provides the EPDP with funds for the welfare of paramilitary cadres who are allegedly unemployed until a lasting peace settlement. Vigneswaran's former crony EPDP leader Douglas Devananda, he alleged, funnels those government funds to the Karuna faction. "When Karuna began working with the Sri Lankan Army," Vigneswaran opined, "the EPDP wanted to become Karuna's patron. Douglas wants to keep a militant setup. The Karuna people could fill his losses. Karuna wants to be independent, but the EPDP wants to merge, because they're uncomfortable without an armed paramilitary." The EPDP, he charged, has become the go-between for financial deals with Karuna, with the EPDP of course taking a percentage of the funds. Vigneswaran cited the Karuna issue as the most crucial impediment to the peace process, claiming the GSL must address the issue by stopping funding to the EPDP if it is serious about making headway. (Note: The Sri Lankan military has consistently denied that it has any links--financial or otherwise--with the Karuna group.)

¶6. (C) Comment: Sri Lanka's poisonous political climate can often make it hard to determine whether personal vendettas or genuine ideological differences are driving its many internecine battles. There can be many reasons why Vigneswaran broke with his former friend and party leader Douglas Devananda--not all of them political--and while his allegations about the GSL/EPDP/Karuna funding nexus sound plausible, we do not know if they are true. That said, Vigneswaran's contention that the Tamil people, through the dominance of various militant groups, have not had access to a practical political voice holds merit. If Vigneswaran can succeed in forming an umbrella party merging moderate Tamil voices with those of obsolete former militant organizations, perhaps another voice can compete viably with the TNA. Over the years, however, the LTTE has systematically eliminated

all credible political opposition to its claim to be the sole representative of the Tamil people. As Vigneswaran himself noted, the LTTE propaganda machine, especially among the Diaspora, is formidable, and any alternate Tamil political movement faces tremendous challenges--not the least of them physical survival.

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